Development of consulting services to support export entrepreneurship 发展支持出口活动的咨询服务

DOI: 10.17747/2618-947X-2025-2-154-162 УДК 339.5:658.64 JEL F10, F63, L26, P33 Kravchenko S.I.



# Development of consulting services to support export entrepreneurship

S.I. Kravchenko<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Russian Federation)

### **Abstract**

The article focuses on enhancing consulting services to promote the effective development of export entrepreneurship. It emphasizes two main aspects. First, it highlights the importance of popularizing and implementing the core principles of organizational ambidexterity, which should lead to improved financial results for small and medium-sized businesses involved in export activities, making them more stable and predictable for owners in the long run. Second, it discusses the differentiation of consulting services for exporting firms based on their life cycle stage and experience in export entrepreneurship, ensuring that the support provided is clear, valid, and timely. The theoretical and practical significance of this study lies in enhancing the validity of the list of consulting services offered to enterprises interested in engaging in foreign trade amid increasing restrictions. The proposed recommendations can serve as a foundation for refining the content of consulting services for exporters, helping them avoid difficulties and minimize errors in selling their products, as well as optimizing their resources for entering international markets. A promising avenue for further research could involve identifying the factors that influence customer satisfaction with consulting services in export entrepreneurship, as well as developing economic and mathematical models to determine the direction and strength of the relationships between these factors. **Keywords:** consulting services, export entrepreneurship, organizational ambidexterity, type of exporter, life cycle, development

#### For citation:

Kravchenko S.I. (2025). Development of consulting services to support export entrepreneurship. *Strategic Decisions and Risk Management*, 16(2): 154-162. DOI: 10.17747/2618-947X-2025-2-154-162. (In Russ.)

### 发展支持出口活动的咨询服务

S.I. Kravchenko<sup>1</sup>

1俄罗斯联邦政府金融大学(俄罗斯,莫斯科)

### 简介

本文致力于改善咨询服务领域,以有效发展出口业务活动。主要关注两个方面。首先是普及和协助实施组织灵活性的基本原则,从长远来看,这应有助于改善从事出口活动的中小型企业的财务业绩,并使其对企业主而言更加稳定和可预测。其次,根据出口企业所处的生命周期阶段及其出口业务活动经验,对出口企业的咨询进行区分,这将确保所提供支持的明确性、有效性和及时性。这项研究的理论和实践意义在于,在限制越来越多的情况下,促进提高向有意开展对外贸易的企业提供的咨询服务清单的有效程度。提出的建议可作为调整出口商咨询服务内容的依据,以帮助他们在销售产品的过程中避免困难和减少失误,并优化资源的使用,从而进入国际市场。进一步研究的一个有希望的方向可能是,在接受出口创业领域咨询公司的服务时,对影响客户满意度的因素进行证实,并在此基础上形成经济和数学模型,以确定这些因素之间关系的方向和强度。

关键词: 咨询服务、出口活动、组织灵活性、出口商类型、生命周期

### 供引用:

Kravchenko S.I. (2025). 发展支持出口活动的咨询服务。战略决策和风险管理, 16(2): 154–162. DOI: 10.17747/2618-947X-2025-2-154-162. (俄文)

### Introduction

The country's existing resource potential, as well as the development of science and technology, contributed to the establishment of export activity as a driving force for the economy, providing on average 27.5% of GDP between 2011 and 2022. However, recent increased external restrictions have led, according to the Federal State Statistics Service, to a decrease in the share of exports of goods and services in GDP to 23.3% in 2023 (in particular, the net export share decreased from 12.6% in 2021 to 4.3%)<sup>1</sup>. This not only necessitated significant adjustments to the established mechanisms of export entrepreneurship, but also increased the importance of companies providing consulting services in this area.

Export-oriented consulting helps to effectively overcome various barriers and reduce risks by offering relevant knowledge and expertise. This is especially important for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that seek to maintain old foreign markets or enter new ones. Today, export consultants provide companies with information on a wide range of issues, including identifying suitable markets, conducting market research, analysing product compatibility, logistics, customs clearance, and payment methods. Consultants help exporters produce products that meet international standards and optimise their strategies in today's turbulent conditions, avoiding difficulties and minimising mistakes in the exporting process.

## 1. Initiatives for the development of export entrepreneurship

Within the framework of a significant number of initiatives at various levels of government, information, consulting, educational and other services are already actively provided to SMEs and self-employed citizens. A comprehensive export support system is also being developed. For example, the national project 'Small and Medium Entrepreneurship and Support for Individual Entrepreneurial Initiatives' provides for the implementation of federal projects such as 'Creation of a digital platform for targeted selection of SMEs and individuals and remote support measures', 'Creating conditions for easy start-up and

comfortable business operation', 'Accelerating small and medium enterprise growth', and 'Supporting the self-employed'.

As part of the national project, more than 430 My Business centers have been opened in 88 regions and municipalities (excluding Moscow) since 2019. These centers integrate the entire infrastructure of SME support into one place and provide services in various areas: financial, educational, property, information, consulting, assistance to entrepreneurs operating in the fields of innovation and modernisation, as well as exports of goods, work, and services<sup>3</sup>.

Another initiative in the field of support for entrepreneurs, the self-employed, and those planning to start their own businesses is the state platform 'Digital Platform MSP.RF'. It acts as a single point of access to government support measures and various services for businesses. Since 2022, more than 895,000 users have registered on MSP. RF, more than thirty online services are available and more than 800 support measures can be applied online<sup>4</sup>.

However, it should be noted that export entrepreneurship is specific, and the above initiatives are designed for a wider audience of entrepreneurs. In this regard, other initiatives that take into account the specifics of export activities to a greater extent should be highlighted separately. For example, JSC Russian Export Center (REC), a state institution for supporting non-resource exports, brings together a group of companies that offer a wide range of financial and non-financial assistance measures to Russian exporters. The REC actively collaborates with federal and regional authorities, as well as key industry and business organisations, which enables it to effectively advance the progressive improvement of conditions for conducting export-oriented business activities in the Russian Federation. As of 2024, the amount of financing provided by this institution is 465.5 billion roubles<sup>5</sup>.

Separately, it is necessary to highlight the digital platform 'My Export', which was launched in 2020 under the auspices of the Russian Export Center, together with eleven specialised ministries, federal executive bodies, and business associations. These include the Ministry of Industry and Trade, the Ministry of Agriculture, Rosselkhoznadzor, the Federal Customs, and the Federal Tax Services.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Federal State Statistics Service. https://rosstat.gov.ru/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> National project 'Small and medium-sized entrepreneurship and support for individual entrepreneurial initiative'. http://government.ru/rugovclassifier/864/events/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Portal 'My Business'. https://xn--90aifddrld7a.xn--p1ai/project.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Digital platform MSP.RF. https://xn--l1agf.xn--p1ai/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Russian Export Centre. https://www.exportcenter.ru/company/.

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The platform provides online access for exporters to government and business services that help companies enter foreign markets<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, the list of services provided to SMEs, including those engaged in export activities (or planning to do so), is quite wide. This is certainly a positive development. However, constant increasing external restrictions cause significant turbulence in current business conditions, which is exacerbated by the rigidity of many newly accessible markets.

In such a situation, entities that provide consulting support for exporters need, on the one hand, to popularize and utilise existing successful practices and developed tools in their operations, and, on the other hand, they need to deepen and supplement them. Additionally, it is advisable to continuously analyse and adapt the current list and content of services to external circumstances, taking into consideration successful domestic and international experience. Furthermore, it is significant to emphasise that provided consulting services should meet the expectations and requirements of consumers, as well as aim to reduce barriers to entering foreign markets for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Russia, and reduce resistance to possible alterations in conditions and management methods.

### 2. Organisational ambidexterity in export entrepreneurship

An important aspect of business development, which has recently attracted the attention of a number of researchers [Gianzina-Kassotaki, 2017; Gonzalez, De Melo, 2018; Brix, 2019; Chakma et al., 2021; Trachuk et al., 2024; Ahmad et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2024; Martínez-Falcó et al., 2024], is ambidexterity. At the same time, the researchers argue that 'all other things being equal, organisational ambidexterity does indeed improve the financial performance of small and medium-sized businesses. In addition, it reduces the dispersion of these results, that is, makes them more stable and predictable for business owners' [Smara et al., 2024]. This aspect fully applies to export entrepreneurship and, therefore, must be taken into account when providing consulting services in terms of developing export entrepreneurship in conditions of uncertainty.

Based on this, the principles of organisational ambidexterity should be implemented through certain recommendations for providing consulting services aimed at increasing the efficiency of exporting entrepreneurship. Potential options for such recommendations may include.

- 1. Developing a set of materials for export companies on issues of ensuring strategic flexibility and scenario planning. The recipient of services should develop several future scenarios based on potential changes in the market, changes in regulatory framework and geopolitical risks, which will help prepare for different possible outcomes. In addition, it is necessary to emphasise the importance of regularly reviewing and updating the company's strategic plan to adapt to changing circumstances, as well as implementing a flexible strategic planning process that allows for rapid changes in focus and priorities. Managers must develop competencies in the area of allocating limited resources between short-term profit-making activities (exploitation) and long-term innovation and market research. It is important to maintain a dynamic balance in order to quickly adapt to new opportunities or threats.
- 2. Developing case studies for working with exporters to develop decentralised decision-making capabilities. Exporters should be able to empower teams in different geographic regions to make decisions quickly in line with local market conditions, as this increases responsiveness to the local market. Focus should be placed on analysing the feasibility of creating separate units or teams for research (e.g., innovation labs, R&D departments) and operations (core business operations). These units should be integrated but operate semi-independently to focus on achieving their goals.
- 3. Developing and implementing programs for establishing innovative collaboration and partnerships. Two aspects need to be addressed: externally, it is important to form partnerships with other companies, research institutes, and industry experts in order to gain access to new technologies, markets, and ideas (which can facilitate both exploration and routine), and internally, it is necessary to create cross-functional teams consisting of specialists from different areas within the company who can explore new opportunities while ensuring compliance with the core capabilities of the company.
- 4. Develop a set of materials for export companies on how to increase the use of technology and make data-driven decisions. The materials should cover the use of advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, big data analytics, and machine learning, to collect information, predict trends, and make

 ${\it Table 1} \\ {\it Roadmap for the implementing measures to introduce the principles of organisational ambidexterity}$ 

| Stage                            | Actions   |  |  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Stage 1: Evaluation and planning | Conducting a comprehensive assessment of current operations, market conditions, and organisational capabilities  Developing a detailed plan to implement ambidexterity principles, with clear goals, deadlines, and resource allocation |  |  |
| Stage 2: Pilot programmes        | Launching pilot programmes for key initiatives such as cross-functional team building, new technology implementation, and market research  Monitoring performance and gathering insights to scale successful initiatives                |  |  |
| Stage 3: Scaling and integration | Scaling successful pilot programs across the organisation  Integrating market research and development activities into the overall organisational structure and culture   |  |  |
| Stage 4: Continuous improvement  | Establishing processes for continuous feedback monitoring and improvement  Regularly reviewing and adjusting strategy and tactics to maintain balance and adapt to new challenges   |  |  |

Source: compiled by the author.

informed decisions. This helps both to identify new opportunities and optimise current activities. Cases should also consider the implementation of real-time data monitoring systems to track market changes, customer behaviour, and supply chain dynamics. This allows for quick adjustments to strategies and operations.

5. Developing cases for working with exporters in terms of forming a system for assessing and monitoring the effectiveness of implementing ambidextrous principles. It is necessary to help the company develop competencies for evaluating the effectiveness of these tools, including analysing achieved results and comparing them to set goals. This allows for timely identification of problems, adjustment of management approaches and will be part of a risk management system that allows prompt response to threats and minimises their impact on company activities (especially important in uncertain conditions where unforeseen events can significantly affect success of innovative projects).

It is important to note that measures for implementing the principles of organisational ambidexterity in a company engaged in export activities should be comprehensive and systematic, with a focus on strategic perspective. A simplified

version of the roadmap for implementing these and other measures might look like this (Table 1).

## 3. Differentiation of consulting support according to stages of the exporters' life cycle

According to a number of experts [Kuklina, Korshunova, 2019; Revenko, Sklyar, 2022; Raišienė, Raišys, 2022; Epanchintsev, Shumakova, 2023; Asadi, 2023; Pandey et al., 2024], an important point is the division of consulting support depending on the stage of the life cycle at which the export enterprise is located. For example, for a beginning exporter, the most important thing is to overcome the fear of starting a business. This can be caused by ignorance of current regulations and laws, as well as by the presence of duplicate functions in export development institutions and a lack of competency in researching markets and entering them. Therefore, when providing consulting services, it is necessary to take into account the type of exporter that characterises the experience of the recipient of these services in export entrepreneurship and the stage of their company's life cycle. Table 2 provides an

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Table 2 Directions for providing consulting services by type of exporter

|  | Type of exporter |             |          |
|--|------------------|-------------|----------|
| Directions   | Beginner         | Situational | Systemic |
| Assessment of readiness for export   | +                | +           | +        |
| Market research  | +                | +           |          |
| Identification of market potential   |                  | +           | +        |
| Assessment of tariff and non-tariff restrictions, requirements for the product/service | +                | +           |          |
| Formation of a client profile  | +                | +           |          |
| Selection of tools for finding partners  | +                | +           | +        |
| Competitor analysis  |                  | +           | +        |
| Drawing up an export plan  | +                | +           |          |
| Search for ways to enter the market, including   | +                | +           | +        |
| - direct sales abroad  | +                | +           |          |
| <ul> <li>use of sales agents or distributors in the target country</li> </ul>          | +                | +           |          |
| <ul> <li>licensing of products or services</li> </ul>                                  |                  | +           | +        |
| - franchising of own business  |                  |             | +        |
| - creation of joint venture  |                  | +           | +        |
| - creation of representative office of the company in the target country               |                  |             | +        |
| Identifying and taking into account language and cultural differences                  | +                | +           | +        |
| Financing export activities  | +                | +           | +        |
| Explaining Incoterms rules   | +                | +           |          |
| Building long-term partnerships  | +                |             |          |
| Logistics planning   | +                | +           |          |
| Protecting intellectual property   | +                | +           | +        |
| Features of receiving payment  | +                | +           | +        |
| Insuring against non-payment   |                  |             | +        |
| Preparing for export activities  |                  | +           |          |
| Developing additional knowledge  | +                | +           | +        |

Source: compiled by the author using [Bernard et al., 2007; Casas et al., 2017; Fedotova et al., 2023; Tsyganov et al., 2024].

indicative list of areas that are relevant for providing consulting services for each type of exporters.

It should be emphasised that in scientific publications [Vasilchenko, Sapir, 2021; Nalbandyan, 2022; Sidorov, 2023; Belas et al., 2024; Mai Xuan, Le Tan, 2024; Wang et al., 2024], the authors identify a number of barriers to entering foreign markets for SMEs. Among the most significant issues are: insufficient knowledge of demand and consumer preferences in the target market; insufficient qualifications of personnel to organise export activities; lack of international experience; high competition in the foreign target market; lack of partners, agents, distributors in the foreign market; logistical problems; etc. In addition, due to existing sanctions, the problem of making international payments for exported goods has become particularly pressing.

Overcoming the above and other barriers can be achieved through providing a comprehensive range of consulting services. For instance, insufficient knowledge about demand and consumer preferences in the target market; insufficient qualifications of personnel to organise export activities; and a lack of international experience, can be addressed through providing exporters with consultancy services in the following areas:

- the substantiation of market potential aims to identify opportunities to increase export volumes in order to increase the share of the selected market (including research into the dynamics of GDP, GDP per capita, and average income in the country; the quantity and cost of similar products and services consumed in the market under study, as well as the volume of imports of such products and services, etc.);
- assessment of tariff and non-tariff restrictions in the current conditions of sanctions pressure and uncertainty (including taking into account tariffs and tariff quotas, rules of origin, the country's main requirements for products on the market: verification of standards, mandatory and voluntary certification, design, expectations, language features, color, symbols, etc.);
- protection of intellectual property (including by providing information on the advantages and disadvantages of standard types of intellectual property, as well as familiarisation with the procedure for filing applications and the documents required to obtain a title of protection in various countries);

- development of additional knowledge (including through familiarisation with current educational events and programs aimed at expanding the recipient's knowledge of export promotion services, developing human capital and strengthening the skills and competencies of SMEs necessary for participation in international trade).

Barriers such as a lack of partners, agents, distributors in the external market, and logistical problems, can be mitigated by providing relevant consulting services on:

- logistics planning taking into account the specifics of independent supply chain management (including consultations on the specifics of coordinating freight rates, creating transportation schedules, preparing shipping and export documentation in the face of existing uncertainty, etc.) or by engaging third parties (for example, a freight forwarding company);
- preparation of export activities includes providing information on the list of necessary documentation for transportation of goods depending on the chosen mode of transportation and assistance with checking the correct execution.

The elimination of the barrier 'Difficulties in conducting international settlements as a result of the imposition of sanctions' can be achieved through the provision of consulting services on:

- the specifics of receiving payment for international sales, especially in view of imposed sanctions, include such aspects as the currency in which invoices are issued, payment terms (prepayment, credit) and payment methods, etc.;
- insurance against non-payment, including provision of information on the specifics of legal norms related to making payments in the target country, payment methods that provide a greater degree of security, the specifics of purchasing insurance to cover the risk of nonpayment etc.;
- financing of export activities through providing information on available options for attracting, securing, and using financial resources to carry out export operations.

It should be noted that the same recipient of consulting services may switch from one exporter type to another during the development of their enterprise, which will determine the need for different types

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of services. In addition, the list of areas provided by the type of exporter is not exhaustive and may be amended depending on industry and regional characteristics of the exporting company. It also does not define the priority of tasks, but can serve as a reference list to focus on aspects that are important for the company when providing consulting.

### Conclusion

The paper presents directions for improving consulting service content to effectively develop export entrepreneurship under uncertainty. This focuses on two aspects: popularising and assisting with the implementation of organisational ambidextrity principles, which should ultimately improve the financial performance of small and medium businesses involved in foreign trade and

make them more predictable and stable for business owners; and differentiating consulting services based on the stage of a firm's life cycle and its experience in exporting, ensuring clarity, appropriateness, and timeliness in support provided to exporting firms.

The proposed recommendations can be used as a basis for adjusting the content of consulting services for exporters to help them avoid difficulties and minimise errors in selling their products. They also help to optimally use resources when entering international markets. A promising area for further research is the substantiation of factors affecting customer satisfaction when receiving services from consulting companies in the field of export entrepreneurship. This includes the formation of economic and mathematical models to identify the direction and strength of relationships between these factors.

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### About the author

### Sergey I. Kravchenko

Doctor of economic sciences, professor, professor at the Department of Strategic and Innovative Development of the Faculty 'Higher School of Management' at Financial University under the Government of the Russian Federation (Moscow, Russia). ORCID: 0000-0001-8391-0445.

Research interests: investment and innovation, national innovation systems, science and education management, change management.

SKravchenko@fa.ru

### 关于作者信息

### Sergey I. Kravchenko

经济学博士、教授、俄罗斯联邦政府金融大学管理学院战略与创新发展系教授(俄罗斯·莫斯科)。ORCID: 0000-0001-8391-0445.

科学研究兴趣领域: 投资和创新活动、国家创新体系、科学和教育管理、变革管理。

SKravchenko@fa.ru

The article was submitted on 06.04.2025; revised on 19.04.2025 and accepted for publication on 28.04.2025. The author read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

文章于 06.04.2025 提交给编辑。文章于 19.04.2025 已审稿。之后于 28.04.2025 接受发表。作者已经阅读并批准了手稿的最终版本。